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Sac 4-01.1 Real Paper
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Up from underground

With their hefty circulation and lucrative advertising,
Boston's weekly 'alternative' papers
are not yet Establishment—but they are certainly established.

By Dan Wakefield

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BOSTON. A bearded young man carrying a stack of tabloid newspapers daringly picked his way through rush-hour traffic across from the Boston Public Garden on Arlington Street, peering in the car windows of commuters and shoppers and out-of-town visitors, shouting with mock urgency: "Buy a hippie newspaper! Read all about it—dope, sex, communes, orgies! Get in on the underground!"

The imaginative hawker, one of hundreds who peddle the weekly Boston Phoenix and The Real Paper all over town, got some laughs and some sales with his spiel, but had Sharon King, the city's top TV reporter on consumer affairs, been on the scene, she would surely have chastised him for misrepresenting his product. Boston's two weekly papers have come a long distance up (and away) from underground, and if they don't yet merit the

staid label of "establishment," they are certainly established. Both claim circulations of 100,000 (roughly half the number are free copies given to college students), both are well-financed and showing a profit, both bring out issues that are thick (The Boston Phoenix, usually the larger, has gone as high as 200 pages in a single issue) with entertaining and often astute coverage of the arts, investigative reporting that sometimes makes the city's dailies twitch with embarrassment, and advertising for stereo equipment, waterbeds, record albums and, more recently, supermarket and department-store sales.

If similar "alternative" weeklies are nowhere else as well established financially and in circulation as those in Boston, there are plenty of such papers around the country, both veteran survivors of the counterculture boom of the 60's and newer ones that have sprung up in the 70's. According to its editor, The Real Paper gets "about 50" such papers in exchange subscriptions, from The Bay Guardian in San Francisco to Figaro in New Orleans, Iconoclast in Dallas-Fort Worth, and weeklies based in college towns like Tempe, Ariz. (New Times).

Dan Wakefield in a novelist and journalist whose latest book is "All Her Children," an account of a TV soap opera.

One of Boston's underground-weekly publishers has been put down for being so staid as to be legally married.

Austin, Tex. (The Sun), and Athens, Ga. (The Observer).

Once ignored as entertainment for "the kids," the weeklies in Boston now are read by people like Robert Manning, editor in chief of The Atlantic Monthly, who says, "I don't think of them as 'underground' any more. They're quite legitimate—they've established a place in this community. Every week one or the other has a story I won't get elsewhere or, if not that, an insight into a story that's unique. And they've given a good goose to The Globe and The Herald (The Boston Globe and The Boston Herald American, the city's two remaining dailies)." Barney Frank, State representative for the Back Bay and Beacon Hill areas, and the city's most astute young politician, says of the weeklies, "Both are fairly well read now by people in politics, and even people who don't read them regularly will buy a copy when they hear there's a good, gossipy political story. Word of that gets around. The late George Frazier, in what was The Globe's most loved (and widely discussed) column, declared several years ago that The Boston Phoenix and The Real Paper could no longer be classified as 'underground,' but ought to be known henceforth as 'sea-level' papers."

Just what is this dynamic underdog press duo that is "kicking around" the mighty Globe? Despite the passions aroused by editorial and advertising competition, it is hard to see how The Boston Phoenix and The Real Paper are fighting for readership with either of the city's dailies, The Globe or the Hearst-owned Herald American. It is hard to imagine a citizen at a newsstand deciding to buy The Phoenix or The Real Paper instead of buying a daily. People who buy the weeklies would probably buy a daily paper anyway or not buy it anyway.

talk to Boston Globe editor Tom Winship today, it sounds as if the weeklies have even risen

The top brass of The Phoenix recently discussed taking an ad in a trade publication, showing its staff and saying, "We Want You To Read The Globe." The concept was that The Phoenix is offering a different product, and that people interested in what they read in The Globe would also be interested in reading what The Phoenix considers its more lengthy, comprehensive, in-depth articles on local issues. The Phoenix people still believe in that concept but, on second thought, they couldn't quite bring themselves to pay for an ad that was actually promoting The Globe.

The curse that neither The Phoenix nor its rival, The Real Paper, has been able to shake in their rise to success and respectability is that most readers can't distinguish between them. As Representative Frank noted, "People don't remember which story they read in which paper—it's like Harper's and The Atlantic." The Real Paper's assistant managing editor and popular women's columnist, Laura Shapiro, says, "I'm always meeting people who think they read me in The Phoenix."

The Real Paper's new editor, Martin Linsky, speaks of this confusion with a kind of disconsolate frustration: "Let's face it, people lump the two weeklies together. For simplification, I've heard people call us both The Real Phoenix."

The main problem is they both look alike. Both weeklies are 17-inch by 11-inch tabloids, both covers use color and art work (either photos or drawings) and both manage usually to look provocative without looking "National Enquirer-alike."

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look alike because they're all writing about the same sort of subjects and people. In the same

The Phoenix had Representative Frank on the cover, while The Real Paper had State Senate president Kevin Harrington; another week, The Real Paper cover showed school superintendent Marion Fahey, while The Phoenix displayed another powerful local woman, Massachusetts Banking Commissioner Carol Greenwald.

If there is any consistent difference in the way the two papers cover a story, it is that The Phoenix, with its

staff of young veterans trained in daily, wire-service and TV news coverage, goes for more of a hard-news approach, while The Real Paper is trying for a more feature-like, magazine-article emphasis.

In week-apart stories on South Boston High School, the focus of the city's school-busing controversy, The Phoenix had reporter Dave O'Brien, formerly of The Boston Herald, put together a comprehensive retrospective on the conflict, loaded with names, dates, occurrences and wrapped up with interview-opinions on the outlook by key figures in the controversy. The Real Paper had staff writer Robin Reisig (hired away from The Village Voice by the new R.P. management) do a more personal story on the lives of individual students affected by the crisis.

The weeklies are good at what one observer has called "light muckraking," have exposed corrupt practices in political fund-raising, politicians using influence to get private homes refurbished at taxpayers' expense, a sheriff charging his escargot set and other gourmet utensils to the taxpayers—the gamut of civic

In five years, are we going to be middle-aged men and women with pot bellies, putting out a paper for 20-year-olds?

misdeeds, large and small, by persons and agencies. Neither weekly runs editorials but lets its columns and stories speak for it.

Each paper wishes the other had stuck to the old '60's youth-culture beat of radicalism and rock music, but each is moving with almost identical concern toward community interests, local politics, consumer issues and a broader and more sophisticated coverage of the arts that, while still paying tribute to recordings and pop groups, also goes in for book and theater reviews, extensive and sensitive interviews with authors like Jerzy Kosinski and Mark Vonnegut, reviews of art and photography exhibits, of mime and dance troupes. Both papers not only comment on the arts and entertainment, but explain how to find them as well as assorted other diversions and services, in what are the most up-to-date, imaginative and complete guides to what's happening in the city. The Globe has started its own special section called "Calendar" which, at least in part, is designed to combat this service of the weeklies, but it just doesn't make it. For some inexplicable reason, the dailies, with all their resources, can't seem to match the weeklies in this area; it's almost as if they can't find out what's happening.

Both The Real Paper's "Listings" and The Phoenix's "Schedules" of amusements and services are superb. A sampling of a typical issue of The Phoenix "Schedules" gives an idea of the variety both weeklies offer their readers, ranging from film times to feminism ("Woman Space, a feminist therapy collective"); lectures on anything from antique postcards to the FBI; politics from a talk by Senator Birch Bayh to a "Free Meal and Drop-In Center" for the street community; help for alcoholism, VD, drug, pregnancy, child abuse; a halfway house for ex-prisoners and a "Gender Identity Service"; poetry events from a reading by Denise Levertov at Harvard's Loeb Drama Center to readings by anyone who has written a poem at The 100 Flowers Bookstore Co-operative; and places where you can put the children while you go hear a sonnet or check on your gender identity.

These listings are a vital part of the almost unconscious way in which the weeklies have contributed to the general upsurge of things happening in the city that wasn't discernible a decade ago. There were poetry readings then, and free plays and concerts, but the only way to find out about them was on coffeehouse and college bulletin boards. To take but one example, there are probably more poetry readings in Boston per square inch than in any city in the world, and part of that must spring from the general accessibility of information about them. And poems aren't the only homemade cultural product. Poet Joan Norris wrote in The Real Paper that when she and some others last year founded Book Affair, an annual bazaar to display the work of local small presses and publications, they discovered there were more than 250 publications coming out of the New England area with some regularity, including such "little magazines" as Ploughshares, Arion's Dolphin and Fire Exit, and the excellent women's-oriented press, Alice James Books.

The weeklies not only cover and support such efforts (The Phoenix co-sponsored Book Affair with Boston University), they serve as an outlet for young writers and a goal for others who can read these papers and feel they have a chance too, they don't necessarily have to wait to break into a national periodical before they are published and read.

There is a built-in audience here not only of college students but college dropouts and graduates who chose to stay on in Boston, the young professionals and artistically ambitious, the single swingers and newly-marrieds, the ski-weekenders and Charles River sailors, the film buffs and photography freaks. Anyone who's got some free time and wants to go and see or see something is a potential "Real Phoenix" reader. And it's acceptable now for people over 30 to read the weeklies and admit to liking them. E. E. Sissman, who, as a successful poet-businessman, is Boston's answer to Wallace Stevens, says in his role as advertising executive, "The weeklies are very effective for people advertising things like stereo, cheap

And, as a respected Boston literary establishment man, Sissman adds, "I think the weeklies have a unique role. The quality is often good, and usually there'll be some fun thing something worth reading."

This journalistic phenomenon, which appeals to Harvard Square bookshoppers and also members of Boston's political and literary establishment, began in 1969 when the original Cambridge Phoenix was started by a young Vietnam veteran named Jeffrey Tarter who had worked on Stars and Stripes and wanted to found "a writer's newspaper" that would be "neither liberal nor conservative, neither radical nor reactionary." As one staffer explained

the idea to a friend, "It's supposed to be like The Village Voice, only in Boston."

The Phoenix's first city editor, April Smith (who, like many of its alumni, has gone on to write for national publications such as Rolling Stone and The Atlantic), recalls that "the whole conception of The Phoenix was to be a place where real writers could appear. All you had to do to be hired was to be real. And a writer." Miss Smith, now an executive of Boston's Patrick Nugent ad agency, says, "There was a lot of status to working on the original Phoenix because it was considered to be an all-star team of the best young talent in Boston." She smiles and adds, "And it was a lot of fun."

The Phoenix became even more prestigious and influential when, in the spring of 1970, new owners brought in as editor a St. Louis Post-Dispatch reporter named Harper Barnes. "What they wanted me to do," Barnes says, "was take this 'hippie newspaper' and make it good without making it too respectable." Remarkably enough, Barnes did just that, boosting circulation from under 1,000 to more than 50,000 in two years.

Almost everyone admired the miracle that Barnes had wrought except, ironically, a young Harvard Business School grad who had emerged as the owner and who, when he looked at his Phoenix, told staffers he wished it were more like The

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Wall Street Journal. (He is now in the graduate management program at M.I.T.) The owner fired the editor and a bitter strike of staffers ensued, in which the staffers won a say in the paper's operation but soon lost it when the owner sold the paper out from under them. The "name and good will" of The Phoenix were sold to its major rival, a weekly arts and entertainment paper called Boston After Dark and its publisher, Stephen M. Mindich.

For \$320,000, Mindich was presumably buying, along with the name and good will of The Phoenix, a monopoly on the valuable weekly newspaper business in Boston. Instead, members of the former Phoenix staff begged and borrowed a few thousand dollars and published their own rival weekly, which they called The Real Paper (as opposed to what they labeled the new "Phony Phoenix"). Thus were born the rivals now known by those who can't tell them apart as "The Real Phoenix."

The staff collective at The Real Paper finally began to wear down after three years of going it alone, and in the spring of 1975 decided to look for a buyer. Robert Rotner, the paper's publisher then and now, says, "In the months before we were sold, The Real Paper was going nowhere. It looked like we were going to fight with each other until we destroyed each other."

Purists and cynics alike were bemused by the establishment credentials of The Real Paper's new owners—attorney Ralph Fine, former chairman of the Boston Finance Committee (a watchdog group that investigates the handling of the city's money), former Republican State Representative Martin Linsky, and David Rockefeller Jr., son of banker David, nephew of Vice President Nelson, and former assistant manager of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. But Real Paper staffers are not concerned about the establishment background of their new bosses; they are happy to have what one called "the influx of new money and energy they've brought."

Women's columnist Laura Shapiro can sense any political changes imposed from above and, as for the issue of a Rockefeller on the paper, she says, "David's such a nice person, I can't imagine anyone saying anything mean about him." Andrew Konkord, a professional critic of the power structure, says that the new editor not only lets him write as he did before but has asked him in some cases to "come on stronger."

The new owners, far from hiding their respectability under a bushel, are paying to advertise it. They took a full page in Ad East, the trade journal of the New England advertising community, announcing that "The Real Paper is run by a bunch of young freaks like Marty Linsky . . . Ralph Fine, and David Rockefeller Jr." The copy tries to dispel the fears of potential advertisers by assuring them: "In case you think The Real Paper is suitable primarily for health foods, restaurants and movie advertising, look at the ads. You'll find such freaky way-out advertisers as The First National Bank of Boston, Trans World Airlines, American Motors, Heublein, Stop and Shop, Star Market, Lechmere, and State Mutual Insurance."

Taking their respectability campaign a bold step further, The Real Paper bought another

full page in Ad East, with a picture of David Rockefeller Jr. in shirt sleeves at his desk in The Real Paper office, and a line of bold type below it that said:

"I got my job through The Real Paper."

—DAVID ROCKEFELLER JR.

Rockefeller is, in fact, moving his personal office from the Boston financial district to The Real Paper's headquarters in an old-fashioned frame house, painted yellow with white trim, on Cambridge's tree-lined Mt. Auburn Street. Asked if he'd had any criticism about being involved with what many establishment people still regard as a radical paper, Rockefeller answered, "I don't think we or The Phoenix are radical papers. Both are interested in commercial success. We

at The Real Paper are determined, though, to take courageous stands on issues, even if it means that higher political and economic forces may try to shut us down." David Rockefeller Jr., executive vice president of The Real Paper, is worried about the power structure.

The Real Paper's new editor, 35-year-old Martin Linsky, is a former Republican State Representative with an excellent reputation as a legislator. His liberalism gave him trouble in his own party, and he was almost defeated in the 1972 Congressional primary by an archconservative. In the general election, he lost to his Democratic opponent, the Rev. Robert Drinan. He said his main goal as editor of The Real Paper is "to hold people in power accountable for what they do—and explain the reality of how they operate to our readers. I've been immersed in this city and its politics for 15 years and, as editor, I can bring that experience to our writers."

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Across the Charles River in Boston, The Phoenix has recently moved from its storefront on Boylston Street to more commodious digs a few blocks around the corner at 100 Massachusetts Avenue. In the spacious reception room, a middle-aged woman who seemed to be the proprietor of a greeting-card shop was telling the attractive receptionist that some of her customers have complained of her having The Phoenix for sale because they don't like some of "the words" in the paper. The receptionist said, "Isn't it funny how some people are offended by simple little words but they aren't

bothered by total lies on the front pages of certain big daily newspapers? Isn't that ironic?"

I told the receptionist I was there to see Stephen M. Mindich, and thought of another irony—that while the new owners of The Real Paper are intent on advertising their personal success and respectability, Mindich, as publisher of The Phoenix, has had to

apologize for those same attributes. He has been called a "hippie Hearst" and snidely attacked for having a nice home in the suburbs with a "nicely legitimate wife and . . . perfectly legitimate baby." Mindich is probably the only man in America who has been put down for being legally married. Several journalists who heard I was going to interview Mindich told me the "inside story" that he had just bought a Rolls Royce. As one of them said with a leer, "Not bad for an underground publisher, huh?"

I was not surprised that Mindich had told me on the phone he didn't know if he'd submit to another interview because, after his recent experiences, he had decided that he would "only talk to writers from places like Forbes and Fortune—they appreciate success." I assured Mindich I appreciated success myself and, after some discussion, he agreed to talk with me. "I guess for some people I'm supposed to be a hippie, but that's not me," he said. "I wear a suit and a shirt with cuff links. If I have to see a banker, I don't want to show up wearing a leather headband and dungarees and play a role. I've finally stopped apologizing for the success of the paper. After all, nobody gave it to me. When I started Boston After Dark, I was working 18 hours a day for \$50 a week, writing reviews and selling ads and editing copy. I've done the whole thing. I shouldn't have to apologize."

Mindich is a short, brash, hard-driving man of 32 with coal black hair and a black mustache, given to dramatic suits, colorful shirts with ornamental cuff links, and aviator glasses. He is a recognized supersalesman who got the conservative old Jordan Marsh department store to advertise in The Phoenix ("I worked for two years on that, I was told it couldn't be done," he says with pride.)

Around the corner on Newbury Street, at Charlie's Eating and Drinking Place, Mindich is ushered royally to a preferred corner table and

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treated like Johnny Carson lunching at "21." He speaks of the growing recognition the paper's success and influence have brought him, tapping the table emphatically with his finger. "In the last state election, every politician running for major office came in to meet with me and our editors for informal discussion of the issues. I recently spoke at the B.U. Journalism School on 'The Role of the Alternative Weekly.' I've talked at the M.I.T. Club and the Ad Club. I've conducted a seminar for the National Catholic Press Association. Tomorrow, I'm speaking at Northeastern." He leans forward across the table, his face lights up as he says, "And I love it!"

The Phoenix now holds the lead in advertising, size of issues, and paid circulation (official publishers' statements for the past year show the average paid circulation of The Phoenix at 59,000, and The Real Paper at 40,000, with both unofficially claiming an average of 50,000 free papers distributed to students, a figure that rises as high as 80,000 in peak collegian periods like the opening of the fall semester). But with the financial clout the new ownership has brought The Real Paper, it is bound to move up, as it already has begun to do. By any account, both papers must be judged successful. The question is why, when so many of their counterparts have died or faded or fallen onto hard times, like the once vital Los Angeles Free Press, now turned into what one L.A. editor calls "a wraparound for porno ads" with a recent front-page story on "transvestite fashion."

Andrew Kopkin wrote in the Cambridge-based quarterly Working Papers that "metropolitan Boston's half-million student and student-age young people are the region's most striking demographic feature. One or another aspect of the youth culture may be more obvious than in New York, Madison Avenue, or Los Angeles."

in Boston it appears in its most concentrated form..." Globe editor Winship agrees that "the reason the weeklies are thriving here is that Boston's youth market is the biggest in the world, with 50 colleges in a radius of 50 miles."

Phoenix book editor Richard Rosen got into an argument at a touch football game with some of his colleagues who advanced the theory of the "vacuum left by the dailies" as an explanation for the

weeklies' success. Rosen argued that "the dailies in Boston are better than they are in most other cities, but we have a better audience here for our thing—the huge pool of recent college graduates."

In fact, the dailies in Boston have healthy circulations, with the morning and evening Globe editions totaling 475,346 on weekdays, and the Herald American morning paper, 338,000; the Sunday Globe has 583,787 and the Sunday Herald American 496,000. Whether one agrees with Time magazine that The Globe is one of the country's 10 best dailies, or with the journalism review [MORE] that the Herald American is one of the 10 worst (and, of course, it is possible to agree with both), each paper has its faithful followers and its particular attributes. The Herald American has The New York Times News Service, conservative editorials, and a new publisher who is promising big things. The Globe has won four Pulitzer prizes in the past nine years; it has outstanding columnists in Diane White and Ellen Goodman, who seem to be among the few women columnists on daily newspapers allowed to go beyond the dishpan beat, and sportswriter Bud Collins.

Though rivalries and outright hostilities exist among and between the city's dailies and weeklies and even monthlies and quarterlies, there is also a sense in which the whole surge of local journalism and literature here since the late '60's seems unconsciously and even unintentionally to work for the benefit of all concerned.

Winship and other Globe editors read the weeklies in search of ideas, so Rosen of The Phoenix explains that "we scour The Globe every day, looking for leads, tips, stories to follow up on. The Globe is like our wire service."

Writers from the weeklies have gone on to the dailies and vice versa; the weeklies are no longer considered merely a training ground for young writers. As Mindich says, "We're not just a place for writers to come from, but to come to." Richard Gaines came to The Phoenix from the Boston bureau of U.P.I. because "I was frustrated with doing 'nuts and bolts' stuff, rewriting press releases, not being able to develop a story at length. I can do all that at The Phoenix without having to punch any time clocks. And The Phoenix matched my U.P.I. salary dollar for dollar."

A nationally established writer like Andrew Kopkin,

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who has settled in Boston, enjoys being a staff writer for The Real Paper because "I like having some kind of sense of being part of the community I live in. You can't have a feeling of community by writing only for national publications. You get more prestige and money writing for Esquire and New Times and Playboy, but it's also more fragmenting." Rosen, who graduated from Harvard in '72, says the weeklies provide young writers "an opportunity to write about the kinds of things that I wouldn't be able to write about till middle age if there weren't a Phoenix or a Real Paper."

But some young people who develop on the weeklies become uneasy when they begin to feel they are no longer young people. After six years of working on the weeklies, Bob Rotner says, "I'm 31 now, and sometimes I wonder, 'Who are our readers?' In five years, are we going to be middle-aged men and women with pot bellies and white belts, putting out a paper for 20-year-olds? I worry that maybe I'll wake up one day and find I'm like that, a horror

Both weeklies now seem involved in a sort of middle-aged, corporate identity crisis. They want to retain their youth audience (with the accompanying stereo, water bed, wine and record advertising that is their economic base) and at the same time grow gracefully into the middle-aged market of responsible, home-owning readers with families and credit cards and bank accounts. "They're both going establishment faster than they realize," says The Globe's Winship. "I think they may lose their own market." The weeklies feel they can keep their young readers by maintaining their extensive listings of events and entertainment and providing them with useful information, but Linsky says, "We don't have any illusions that they're interested in our cover story on the State Senate president, or what's going on at city hall."

In the push for respectability, both papers now find themselves embarrassed by a feature that has long been the trademark of counter-culture journalism, and is also one of the favorite parts of the papers for many readers—the personal classified ads. The personals in both The Real Paper and The Phoenix run the usual assortment of coded appeals such as WF (white female) with

Ph.D. and interest in Vivaldi seeks nondrinker for fireside chats, or leather dude looking for dominant Scorpio, but in each paper there are originals in this native art form, from respectively, The Real Paper and The Phoenix:

"I am a happily married man, 31, who is sometimes a little bored with the same two fried eggs in the morning. Perhaps you also feel the desire for a fresh banana..."

"Al Pacino lookalike seeks buxom brunette knowing Sophie Tucker joke w/experience at washboard be the robin in my lovenest..."

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Laura Shapiro recalls that in the early days of The Phoenix, when "the weird classifieds started coming in," one staff member's cat had kittens and he put in an ad offering them for sale. "He got over 60 replies," Laura said, "and not one of them was about kittens. They all thought the ad was some kind of code for a far-out sexual perversion."

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The personals have great popularity, but it doesn't extend to the suburbs, as Mindich found when some supermarket managers cited the ads as reason for refusing to sell The Phoenix in their stores. Marty Linsky anguishes that "eventually I'd like to take the personals out altogether. They 'position' us as a certain kind of paper. On the other hand, I know a lot of genuinely lonely people who meet through the things, people who have no other way."

A serious consideration is that personals account for a lot of circulation. Paul Corkery, a former editor of The Phoenix, says, "I really believe a large part of the readership buys the paper exclusively to read the personals."

Lately, there has been a rumor that Mindich might make The Phoenix a daily, but he says emphatically, "I have no desire to go daily. That's not where journalism is at now. Most people get daily news from radio or TV. They read a daily paper for sports, ads and stock market reports. What I'd really like to do is put out the same type of weekly we have here in different cities."

The Phoenix's Richard Rosen went home to Chicago last fall, "thinking vaguely of starting a weekly there." He knew that some of the old ones had collapsed or gone into decline, but he found a lively one called The Chicago Reader that is given away free but "has expanded, is getting

advertising, and doing good stuff." He found that the paper was run by "some kids who went to Carleton College in Minnesota and, when they graduated, they went back to Chicago and started their own paper."

Just as the original Phoenix was made up largely of recently graduated staffers of the B.U. News, so a number of college journalists have banded together to form the nucleus of a new weekly paper in a big city or a college community. They have made such publications a possible dream, and updated e.e. cummings's poem of youth that begins "let's start a magazine." Now the line should read "let's start a weekly paper," and should not be said with tongue in cheek. ☐

Other cities, other weeklies

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 By Stephen Schlesinger

LOS ANGELES FREE PRESS

Starting in 1964 as a casual, radical weekly, swinging freely at cops and politicians, The Free Press (or Freep) achieved a circulation of about 100,000 by 1968, grossing \$2 million a year. But in 1969 the Freep ran a front-page story, "Know Your Local Narc," listing Los Angeles's narcotics agents and their home addresses. The narcs sued, and the paper got hit with \$53,000 in fines. This, along with other financial difficulties, caused owner Art Kunkin to sell the Freep to a pornography publisher.

These days, the paper publishes an X-rated pull-out section which is larger than the magazine itself, full of graphic photos of young nude masseuses exclaiming, "I Want Your Body." The readership has shifted dramatically, too, away from the student activists of the 60's to a predominantly male readership, half of which is over 40. Although the publi-

cation still carries incisive pieces on the poor and victimized as well as columns by Ralph Nader and Jack Anderson, circulation has dipped, the quoted figures varying from 85,000 to 30,000.

BERKELEY BARB

The 10-year-old Barb has endured traumas which might have done in most other publications. In 1969, its staff discovered that its founder and editor was pocketing a lot more money than they realized; they quit en masse and tried, unsuccessfully, to begin another magazine. Meanwhile, Rolling Stone lured away The Barb's music advertising, and the new weekly Bay Guardian cut deeply into its audience. In 1975, The Barb went through more than half a dozen editors and business managers. Still, it has never missed an issue, mainly because it retains a firm advertising base—the massage-parlor industry.

Though soiled, The Barb has managed to stay politically fervent. The Weathermen, the S.L.A. and the New World Liberation Front on occasion send it their communiqués. Its spirit is undiminished, but its peak circulation of nearly 85,000 in 1969 has dwindled to less than 20,000.

THE SUN

First published in Ann Arbor, where the University of Michigan is located, the twice-a-month tabloid gained some note in the early 70's with its crusade to overturn Michigan's punitive marijuana laws. Impatient with its small base in Ann Arbor, The Sun last October summoned up the courage to relocate in bleak, gritty Detroit. Since then, its circulation has shot up from about 9,000 to 22,000.

The paper is heavy on Motown entertainment, tends to flaunt its radicalism, but also runs in-depth studies of the police trade in heroin in Detroit and interviews with politicians like black Mayor Coleman

or sexist ads, although it accepts personal messages. Co-publisher David Fenton, 23, says, "We're maturing. We're less into rock and acid, more into what's happening in the city of Detroit."

FIGARO

New Orleans has supported two alternative weeklies over the last four years. The feistier is Figaro, founded in 1972 by a former managing editor of The Harvard Crimson, James Glassman, 29, and his wife, Mary. The Courier is half a dozen years older than Figaro, but is on a downslide.

In a town notorious for its substandard daily papers,

Figaro has won renown for its reporting. An analysis of the economic damage wrought by the demolition of old residential housing on one of the city's main thoroughfares influenced the City Council to ban further housing removal without a permit. The paper also conducted the first investigation of cost overruns at the city's Superdome and, last year, tipped off the F.B.I. on the whereabouts of Clarence Medlin, who conned CBS out of \$10,000 by claiming he could lead the network to James Hoffa's body. Neatly laid out and easily readable, Figaro has, after three years, attracted big-store advertising and expects to make money in 1976. Its total circulation is 23,000 (10,000 given away on college campuses), up 30 percent in 1975.

THE DRUMMER

Beginning in the flower-child and antiwar scene of 1967 as The Distant Drummer, this Philadelphia paper was the first alternative weekly to receive mailed Xerox copies of documents stolen from the F.B.I.'s Media, Pa., office. It has won awards for investigations into Philadelphia's juvenile court and exposed an undercover agent for a suburban police force as a racist. These days, however, The

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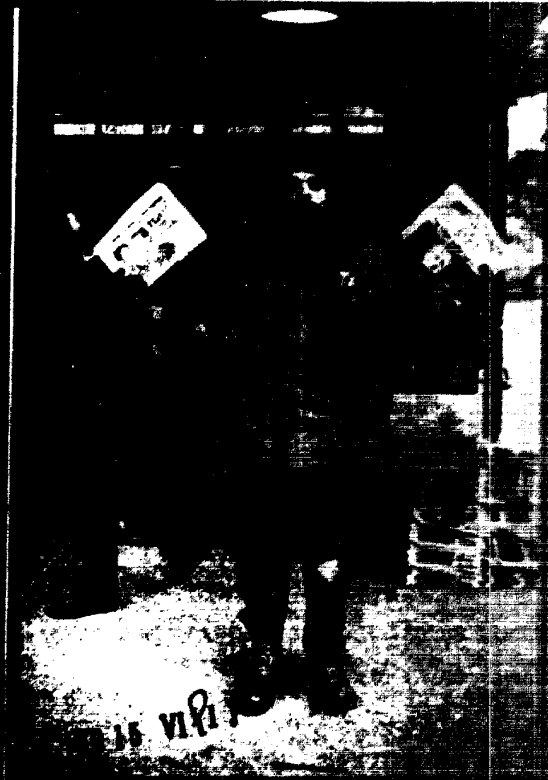
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Drummer lacks some of the old bounce and bite. The emphasis of the owner, Jon Stern, on keeping profits high and wages minimal has prompted a sizable turnover in the staff.

Recently, a number of the paper's editors left for the city's newest alternative weekly, *The New Paper*, owned by Philadelphia magazine. Now three months old, *The New Paper* has money, professional talent and sickness, which are forcing Stern into improving working conditions at *The Drummer*. With its college entertainment guide, called "The Daily Planet," *The Drummer* has a circulation of around 13,000 (50,000 copies of *The Planet* are distributed free to university campuses). The paper can be kept alive with the advertising in *The Planet*, but if it is to live on as a force, it will need some juicing up. ■

Stephen Schlesinger is a writer for *Time* magazine and author of a recently published book, "The New Reformers."



Far-out across the Charles: A hawker peddles Boston's underground newspapers in Harvard Square, Cambridge.



New journalists. The staff of one of Boston's thriving weeklies (and opposite, their archrival, *The Phoenix*). Says Mindich, "I guess I'm supposed to be a hippie, but I'm not."

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